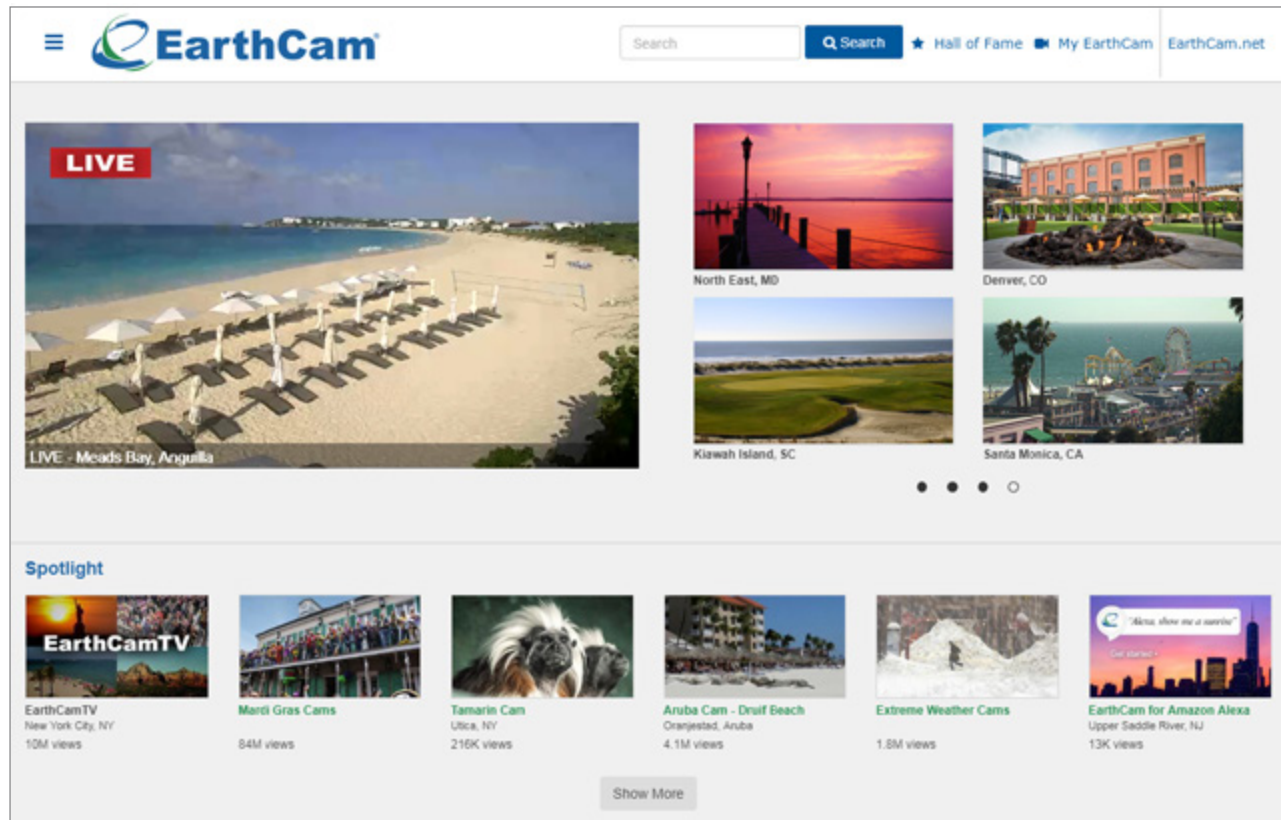


The Best Websites and Web Apps for Making Use of Exactly One Hour of Free Time

By David Nield • February 12, 2019



It's lunchtime—or maybe it's just a break you're taking from the world. Either way, you've got an hour to spare, and that could mean running errands or braving the outdoors, or it could mean snacking at your desk while idly clicking around the internet (employer IT policy permitting). If you're looking for inspiration for your next 60 minutes of non-work web browsing, here are some of the best educational, entertaining, or downright weird options we know about.

MapCrunch

Sure, you might not initially think the idea of spending your lunch hour looking at a collection of Street View images is all that appealing, but a few minutes with the fantastic MapCrunch will change your mind—scoot around the globe manually one place at a time, or transport yourself to a random location with a click (you can limit your jump to particular countries, if you want).

Vocabulary

Do something educational and productive with your lunch break by learning a new word, or a hundred new words, every day—you can either get the site to suggest words, or you can specify the word definitions you want to commit to memory. The actual teaching is done via a series of simple games, where you have to fit the right word in a sentence, or pick the right picture for a word, or specify its meaning. You then get some useful background details on the word, including where it originates from and how you can best deploy it.

The Internet Archive

If today's internet isn't really doing it for you, delve into the web of the past, courtesy of the Internet Archive. As well as hosting archives of older websites (check out early Gizmodo), the site also offers up huge libraries of books, videos, images, software, and audio clips that you can access for free. Despite there being such a wealth of material here, it's all easy to get around and well organized.

Line Rider

More addictive than you might think, Line Rider tasks you with drawing a simple line—a line that the eponymous rider then scoots down. Your challenge is to engineer a track that will keep your rider going for the longest time possible, and if you're anything like us, you'll keep coming back to try and beat your previous efforts as you find out what works and what doesn't. The web app is a breeze to use, fast and responsive in whatever browser you like, and lets you share your creations with your colleagues as well...if you want.

LibriVox

Plug in some headphones and let LibriVox transport you to other worlds: The site hosts a massive amount of older, copyright-free literature that's been converted into audiobook form by volunteers, which means you can enjoy some Thomas Hardy or some Mark Twain from the comfort of your desk. You won't find the latest bestsellers available to download for free, but you might be surprised at the amount of content that's on offer here, including fiction, classics, poetry, dramatic works, autobiographies, and more.

GIZMODO

Quick Draw

Thank you, Google, for this delightfully bizarre web-and-AI experiment that challenges you to draw something well enough for its neural engines to recognize it, before the timer runs out—we had to draw everything from an umbrella to the Great Wall of China in our time with the app. What's most fun is watching the artificial intelligence behind the site try and work out what you're sketching while you're actually sketching it. You don't need to be an artistic genius to get a lot of fun out of this, but a touchscreen laptop definitely helps.

HowStuffWorks

A site some of you will have come across before, but worth mentioning for those who haven't discovered it yet (or have forgotten about it): HowStuffWorks is packed with educational info on how almost everything in this world works, from why your pets act the way they do, to the finer points of rocket science. We like the random content jump button, which should get you through several lunchtimes, as well as the listicles that pepper the site and are always entertaining reads—10 strange exhibits in the Smithsonian, anyone?

Snopes

In these troubling times of fake news, trust Snopes to give you the facts behind the headlines—and to debunk those urban myths and ridiculous chain messages your relatives are pasting as their Facebook statuses. Even if you don't want to check up on a particular story or a particular fact, the home page of Snopes is well worth loading up in your lunch hour: Plenty of engaging content is pushed to the front page every day, covering politics, science, culture, sport, and everything else in the news.

NASA Astronomy Picture of the Day

Travel to the stars from your humble office desk with the NASA Astronomy Picture of the Day. It's a selected picture from NASA's image library, accompanied by a few lines of commentary written by a professional astronomer. The text will teach you something you (probably) didn't know, and the image will remind you what an insignificant speck you are in the larger universe. If you want more of the same for the rest of your lunch break, load up the main NASA Image and Video Library and click away to your heart's content.

Feeling Unlucky

If you want to spend your lunch hour poking around the more obscure corners of the internet, then Feeling Unlucky can help. It's a play on the "I'm Feeling Lucky" button on Google that returns the top result straight away, only in this case you get the last result—or at least, one several pages down the list. Whether you're interested in a particular celebrity, TV show, or news story, this site will show you the results that no one else is clicking on, and that'll help you uncover pages you would otherwise never have seen.

Choose Your Story

While Choose Your Story doesn't necessarily score very highly on its design and user interface, it's perfect for diving into an alternative reality for part or all of your lunch break—it's a collection of choose your own adventure stories, and you've got a host of them to pick from. All stories are submitted by users, so the quality can vary, but you can easily jump to the highest-rated ones as well as just pick out a story game at random. If you really get the bug, create your own adventure and see what other people think of it.

EarthCam

We've already mentioned MapCrunch, which is one way of touring the world from your office desk, and here's another. [EarthCam](#) is one of the best collections of webcams out there, and—unlike a lot of webcam portals—most of the cameras are actually in working order. Check out beaches, landmarks, zoos, ski slopes, and much more besides without leaving your browser. It's up to you where in the world you go, and you can either search for specific locations or click around the popular spots that EarthCam is highlighting.